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## Kostwinners en verliezers

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# Rise and fall of the male breadwinner system in the Netherlands 1950-1990

## Summary and conclusions

The central question in this dissertation is whether the increased participation of women in the Dutch labour force in the period 1950-1990 actually led to the expected improvement in their economic position. Economic position was first defined as income position in all stages of life. Analysis of income statistics (based on fiscal data) showed that the total average income of women relative to that of men did not improve. Averages lost significance, however, because income differences grew, between women and between men. Analysis further showed that the average income of women who had been married but were now widowed or divorced, and who once cared for dependants or still did so, declined in relative terms. Apparently, the diminution of financial support previously available for such responsibilities (partner-pensions, alimony, widow pensions, social assistance for lone mothers etc.) was insufficiently compensated for by the new sources of income on an individual basis. While conventional wisdom has it that the cause of the high risk of poverty for women lies in the traditional breadwinner system, it may be more accurate to say that in the eighties this risk originated precisely in its rapid disintegration.

In a subsequent analysis I pose the question of how this disintegration could have occurred so rapidly – and apparently without anything to compensate for it – in a country that has the reputation of having a strong and deeply rooted male breadwinnership tradition. I now define economic position sociologically; as having access to social rights. In historical literature I trace the social rights available for caring persons and offer several possible explanations for their demise and for the failure of proposed alternatives to occur. One such explanation lay in the speed of the changes towards individualisation, another in the demands of the expanding economy and a third in the clashing political and ideological views in the Netherlands. The dissertation ends on a critical note towards a government policy that is bent on further increasing the labour participation of women, a.o. by clearing the last remnants of minimum income guarantees for breadwinners. It is argued that trimming social rights down to those directly bound to the labour market (basically: individual wages) enhances class differences (as labour market positions become more critical) but also creates extra risks for women (or men) that take care, or have taken care, of dependants; as this dissertation showed.